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ABSTRACT

This unit of the Flexible Learning System (FLS) designed for adults who work with children aged 4-8, offers a means of analyzing, evaluating, and selecting books and other educational materials for use in culturally pluralistic classrooms and with young children of Mexican-American heritage. Research which explores the impact of books on children's self-concept and attitudes toward other ethnic groups is reviewed. Criteria for the analysis and evaluation of written text and illustrations in children's books are presented in two sections. The first section includes guidelines for detecting culturally-negative biases in terms of overgeneralization, evaluative and demeaning statements and ethnic stereotypes. The second section underlines the importance of understanding the history, culture, and language of the Chicano, and focuses on recognizing culturally accurate information, language appropriateness, accurate source and treatment of materials, and factual errors. Each section contains evaluation of pictures and text taken from literature often recommended for use with the Chicano child. The unit concludes with self-assessment activities in which sample paragraphs are presented for revision along the lines specified in the guidelines. Bibliographies are included. Related FLS units include: "Selecting Children's Books with a Black Perspective"; "Enriching Literature Experiences of Children"; "Helping Children Develop Healthy Self-Concepts." (Author/SB)

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analyzing children's books from a Chicano perspective

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Analyzing Children's Books From A Chicano Perspective

by

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PREFACE

Throughout this unit you will find examples developed from material found in children's books that are commonly recommended for use by Chicanitos.* These examples illustrate the guidelines to be considered as you select reading materials. You will find that some examples used to illustrate the guidelines are quite obvious and others more subtle. Proceed at your own pace. If you have difficulties with one example, skip it and go to the next one. Group discussion on one or all phases of the unit is encouraged whenever possible. As you complete one part of the unit and go on to the next one, feel free to review any or all segments of the preceding activities.

The selection guidelines, together with examples, will help you to analyze and evaluate a variety of materials relating to the Chicanito.

*A Chicanito is a young child of Mexican-American heritage.

AUTHORS' NOTE

The examples in this unit were developed solely for educational purposes. In all instances, the examples are used out of context; in most instances, using examples out of context changes the intended meaning of those who created the materials from which these examples were adapted.

The opinions stated here are not meant to represent criticism of any specific book. By no means do we imply endorsement or condemnation of any of the books used to generate the examples. Many of the books studied in the search for examples are, on the whole, quite good, and the authors well-intentioned. This unit focuses only on evaluation principles. Examples were developed to give a feeling for the principle to be learned.

Chicano educators who assisted us in analyzing and evaluating each example were encouraged to express freely their professional judgments. However, the opinions expressed in this unit do not necessarily reflect the position of anyone but the authors, and no official endorsement by Chicanos or Chicano groups should be inferred.

FOR WHOM IS THIS UNIT DESIGNED?

This learning unit was designed primarily for those teachers who work with the Chicanito. The authors believe the material should also prove valuable for any adult working with young children in any learning situation. However, the unit was not necessarily developed for professionals with extensive experience in selecting books for minority children.

In this handbook, any teacher can gain experience useful in analyzing and evaluating books used by the Chicanito.

UNIT APPLICABILITY

Though this learning unit is designed with specific reference to the Chicanito, the authors are aware that other Spanish-surnamed children in classrooms need to be considered when the contents of children's books are analyzed for impact upon children (e.g., Puerto Rican, Cuban, Latino, Mexicano).

The authors suggest that this unit can be used as a general guide for analyzing various materials to be used with other Spanish-surnamed children. The guidelines discussed here could well apply to the analysis of the texts of books for any group of minority children. The examples, however, would change as the specific ethnic group changes. Teachers wishing to use this unit for its applicability to other Spanish-surnamed children are encouraged first to read the unit for a general understanding of the guidelines, then to find other examples that demonstrate their understanding of each specific guideline.

UNIT OBJECTIVES

As a result of completing this learning unit, the learner can expect the following outcomes:

1. The learner will acquire the skills to analyze and evaluate the content of books for use by Chicanitos. While acquiring these skills, the learner will recognize the need to supplement existing classroom books. The acquired skills will help teachers in selecting books for cultural veracity (e.g., teachers will choose children's books that do not contribute to forming or strengthening negative stereotypes).

2. The learner will acquire skills useful in analyzing and evaluating supplementary materials that reflect the Chicanito's life style, that support, maintain, and develop the Chicanito's self-concept, and that create understanding of and sensitivity to Chicanos among non-Chicanos.

3. As a result of successful completion of this learning unit, teachers will expand their knowledge about the Chicano culture and life style. It is also expected that Chicanito interest in reading as an activity will improve because chosen books that relate to their culture and life style will be readily available.

4. Teachers will demonstrate their understanding of the content of this learning unit by selecting books for use by Chicanitos whose content does <u>not</u> violate the principles set forth in this learning unit.

INTRODUCTION

The printed word is currently the least expensive, the most commonly used, and for its price the most effective medium of communication. It is therefore not surprising that books have made up approximately 70% of the public school's means of education. What is surprising is that selection criteria for books have not been carefully researcherd, even though much theory has been written about the selection of children's books.

With respect to the depiction of cultures and ethnic groups other than Western and Northern European, there are many children's books that probably have a negative effect on many children's self-concepts. The reasons are chiefly political, ideological, and pedagogical, but ignorance also plays a role.* All too often writers, illustrators, or publishers with goodwill spoil their product by a lack of sensitivity toward some group of people. Although children's books will probably never be totally free of a tendency toward nationalism, it is reasonable to expect the elimination of exaggerated stereotypes, especially those derogatory to different ethnic groups. In far too many of the currently available children's books, there appears a tone of condescension or paternalism toward the minority person. Inaccuracies, demeaning attitudes, and distorted "historic" concepts have all too readily found their way into children's books.

With prodding from federal and state governments, some minor changes in the production of children's books have been noticeable. The movement

* For more complete explanation, see, for example, Beyond "Compensatory Education" edited by G.P. Nimnicht & J.A. Johnson, Jr. (Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C., 1973).

for civil rights has forced publishers to consider more closely whether or not they were doing an injustice to a large segment of the population.* Also, the conditions attached to federal aid to public education, which required proof of compliance with the desegregation law, have made public school systems more concerned about the need for a variety of books depicting the history and accomplishments of minorities in America.**

If books are to remain the basic tool in teaching, then educators, publishers, writers, illustrators, and all concerned with education must remedy their treatment of minority people in school books.

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* To date, major book publishers have made only token gestures in correcting this situation. Token gestures have included coloring faces of previously white characters, extolling the successes of selected persons from the sports and entertainment world without mentioning the condition of the common people, and literally translating Anglo-dominated books, complete with value orientations.

**Our nation's minority children are being brainwashed by their public school books. Books have served to lower the self-concept of minority children by totally excluding or distorting the roles of minority people in American life.

PURPOSE OF UNIT

In the Responsive Education Program, it is especially important that classroom materials maintain, support, and develop a child's healthy self-concept, as well as promote a society which values diversity of culture.* Because books play so important a role in shaping and defining children's attitudes toward themselves and others, they should be carefully analyzed and evaluated for their influence on these attitudes before being selected for use in a responsive classroom.

After analysis and evaluation, however, even seemingly appropriate books are often found to be woefully inadequate in their treatment of minority people, their promotion of a society that values cultural diversity, or their promotion of healthy self-concepts for ethnically different children. What alternative solution can be recommended? A direct approach to improving the quality of children's books in an effort to reach these specific goals would be to rewrite books designed for use in school systems. Although desirable, this solution is, at best, long range; even then there is no guarantee that these new materials would find their way into the classroom. We advocate analysis and evaluation of existing books as a means of determining their appropriateness for minority children. Evaluating the books already being used in schools, and then supplementing these whenever necessary, is a more immediate way to add perspective and balance to the treatment of minority people in books for children. Analyzing the inadequacies of the books, should provide guidelines for selecting supplementary materials to fill in for these books in the areas where they fall short.

* The Responsive Education is one of the major Follow Through models used in kindergarten through third-grade classrooms. For a full description see Beyond "Compensatory Education" edited by Nimnicht and Johnson (Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C., 1973).

The use of carefully chosen supplementary books currently seems to be the most useful method of providing ethnically different children with books which serve to enhance their self-concepts and promote the acceptance of diversity. This method also allows for the better utilization of existing materials.

For these reasons, and because many teachers desire guidance in selecting books, we have undertaken the task of writing a learning unit for teachers that deals only with one specific part of the problem; that is, the analysis and evaluation of the content of books used by Chicanitos in their classrooms. This unit is designed to help teachers become aware of the need to analyze and evaluate the text of books designed for use with the Chicanito, but the skills learned here can also be applied when evaluating books to be used with other children.

Being aware of the complexity of this problem, we have chosen to deal with only the most basic issues. In time, further materials dealing in greater depth with these issues may be developed. The concepts dealt with in this unit are placed in order of difficulty; that is, Level One will deal with those issues that are most evident, whereas Level Two will deal with those issues that are more complex.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

On the following pages, three areas of major concern to those who evaluate and use children's books are reviewed in some detail.

Can children's attitudes about themselves and others be shaped by the careful selection and supplementation of his classroom books?* Despite the fact that books have been (and at least for a while will continue to be) the primary instrument of conveying formal educational information, the analysis and evaluation of books has received scanty research attention. Most books themselves are evidence of the fact that the majority of publishers have no clear educational criteria for designing books, nor any set rules for including illustrations in books. If we are committed as a nation to the development of well-educated people, book production, selection, and evaluation, like all other facets of the educational process, must move toward a more systematic effort.

A review of the analytical literature on the subject indicates that most assumptions of the affective nature of children's books have yet to be proven. Studies of the affective qualities of children's books are few, open to question, and sometimes contradictory. Such research studies** fall into three basic categories:

* Attitudes can be learned many ways: through chance remarks in the classroom, through verbal abuse, through incorrect historical information. Perhaps one of the most important ways is through books.

**For years minorities have been inaccurately and superficially represented in this nation's school books. In particular, the Chicano has most often been passed over lightly or forgotten altogether. Despite this glaring oversight, there are few research studies of the affective qualities of children's books which were designed exclusively for the Chicanito. The following studies are cited because they relate to the topic under consideration, because they refer to the effects of the content of school books on minority children, and because they point toward much-needed research specifically focused on the Chicanito in this domain.

1. Content analysis (text and illustration), the most common type of study dealing with children's books.

2. Studies of the general effects of books on the self-concept and behavior of children.

3. The general effects of books on children's attitudes toward others.

1. Content Analysis

Content analysis is the most common type of study dealing with children's books. The more significant studies in this area are described below.

Homze (1966) examined children's literature from 1920 to 1960 and noted that reference to the white middle-class dominates this field. She found evidence for considering children's books a mirror for changes in American family trends over a 40-year period. The more recent books stress reliance on self-sufficiency and good relations with the peer group in contrast to older books which emphasized the importance of family and the need to depend on adults for guidance.

David Gast (1967), investigating minority stereotypes in recent children's books, concluded that although the more objectionable minority stereotypes have disappeared, stereotypes (meaning an over-simplified, often inaccurate view) still predominate. For example a book may deal with minority children, but there may be nothing especially minority about them or about the problems they face that would distinguish them from the average suburban white child. Gast noted that though Negro and Japanese children are usually depicted as living within the mainstream of American life, Chinese, Mexican, and Indian children are depicted as set apart either in Chinatown, in the sleepy adobe, or on the reservation. He suggested that too many writers point out that Mexicans are dark, Catholic, uninterested in education, rural in their surroundings. Young readers might, accordingly, learn to lump

Mexicans into convenient stereotypes by reading these books. Blatt (1968) searched several special subject booklists for titles of children's books with Mexican-American themes. As a comparison, the same bibliographies were searched for books with Black-American themes. She found 9 books which dealt with Mexican-Americans, whereas 78 treated Black-Americans. It would appear from these figures that children are learning very little about Americans of Mexican descent. She also found and read, for the information and attitudes expressed, 32 children's books dealing with Mexican and Mexican-American life. She concluded that the two groups are essentially the same in terms of their cultures. She hoped, but without success, to separate negative attitudes directed toward immigrant groups from those directed toward Mexicans in general.*

2. General Effects of Books on the Self-Concept and Behavior of Children

Many researchers have attempted to address the issue of whether or not school books influence the self-concepts and behavior of children. Since it is most difficult to assign a mathematical score to a child's affective response to the content of books, and since it is easier, for example, to count the occurrences of certain observable elements in books, research on child's affective response to the content of books has not yet been carefully undertaken.

* These authors have found that many writers of children's books and researchers of cultural distinction have failed to differentiate between the Mexican and Mexican-American cultures and life styles, thereby confounding their perceptions and research conclusions. We wish to state clearly that there is a distinct difference between the cultural customs and life styles of the Mexican and those of the Mexican-American. For further information on these differences, see the recommended readings in the bibliography provided in Level II of this handbook.

Racial attitudes of minority children have been investigated by Clark and Clark (1947), Goodman (1952), Landreth and Johnson (1953), Morland (1958), and Clark (1963), utilizing a variety of techniques, school settings, and geographical locations. Consistently these investigations have arrived at the same conclusions: racial recognition in both white and non-white children appears by the third year and develops in clarity and stability from year to year. These studies find a significant tendency for non-white children to prefer the color white, to prefer to identify themselves as white, or to demonstrate a reluctance to admit that they are non-white. White children, in turn, generally prefer their white skin color.

Larrick (1965) states that non-white children are learning to read and understand the American way of life in books which omit them entirely or scarcely mention them. Undoubtedly a great deal of damage, much of it irreparable, is done to the non-white child's self-concept; but the impact of all-white books upon white children is equally bad.

Rosenfield (1968) contends that all too often the very materials of education--books--serve to lower the self-esteem of these children by total exclusion or distortions of the roles of non-white people in American life.

Georgeoff's research (1968) indicates that children do learn about people and their culture when exposed to such material. Curriculum material about people and their culture can positively affect the self-concept of both white and non-white school children who study it, as indicated by an increase in the self-concepts of both white and non-white children after studying minority history and culture. Georgeoff concluded that the content of the curriculum and the curriculum materials significantly affect the mental and emotional outlook of some children. Therefore, curriculum developers have a responsibility to present accurately the role of minorities in

the building of the United States, to give adequate balance and emphasis to the contributions of minority-group members to the formation of the American heritage, and to provide children with an opportunity to learn more about the accomplishments of all minority groups in the American experience.

Whipple (1963) and Barrett and Barrett (1966) have demonstrated that when children's actual backgrounds and experiences are depicted in books, the children identify themselves more readily with the story characters. Such identification increases the interest and appeal of textbooks and facilitates reading.

Shirley (1969) attempted to study the general effects of reading on concepts, attitudes, and behavior. Although the learners were of high school age, and the books to which they responded were not children's books, the study's findings are worth noting. Significant were the following findings:

1. There were no differences between the fiction and non-fiction books.

2. Better readers were more likely to be influenced by books. The slower readers seem to be the least influenced by books, most likely because they get less enjoyment from reading and read fewer books. (It would be interesting to find out whether they would read more if their reading skills were improved, or if their reading skill would improve if interesting, mature, yet easy-to-read books were more available than at present.)

3. Learners were more influenced by voluntary reading than by assigned reading.

Though Shirley's findings are significant, only 15 percent of the reading influences resulted in a behavioral change, the type most easily measured by present methods. The overwhelming number of changes occurred in the cognitive areas of concepts and attitudes. Certainly these will eventually result in changes in behavior, but changes which are much more subtle and probably less easily measurable.

3. Effects of Children's Books on Attitudes Toward Others

The effects of school books on children's thinking about others is a third major area of research. The most comprehensive review in this area has been done by J.W. Schneyer (1969). He calls attention to three studies specifically dealing with the problem of children's prejudices and reading. They are R.H. Tauran's "The Influences of Reading on the Attitudes of Third Graders Towards Eskimos" (1967), F.L. Fisher's "Influences of Reading and Discussion on Attitudes of Fifth Graders Toward American Indians" (1965), and Evalene P. Jackson's "Effects of Reading Upon Attitudes Toward the Negro Race" (1944). Children's stories appear, at least temporarily, to have a positive effect on children's attitudes toward others. Tauran found that children's attitudes toward Eskimos were definitely shaped by the stories they heard. Positive initial attitudes were reinforced by positive stories. Fisher found that favorable stories about Indians resulted in favorable attitudes toward Indians. Discussions of the stories seemed to make the children's attitudes even more favorable. Jackson noted the same positive reaction to favorable stories about Negroes. However, when Jackson administered the same attitude test two weeks later, whatever favorable attitudes toward Negroes the children had gained through the stories were lost. After two weeks there were no significant differences between experimental and control groups.

Schneyer's evaluation makes note of improper research procedures which may have biased the children's responses, and raises certain doubts about such research studies. He calls for further explanation of the influence of the home, community, and peer group in reinforcing or diminishing the original attitude.

Martin and Lois Hoffman (1971) have been concerned about the effect of media on children's attitudes. They point out that it is reasonable to suppose that in value areas where the parents have strong, explicitly stated views and where the parents serve as models for their children's actions, the media would have little effect. The values and attitudes which should be most vulnerable to media influence should be those on which the significant people in the child's life have not taken a stand. Furthermore, children in homes where parents do not interact frequently with their children should be more susceptible to media influence than children whose relationship with their parents is more intense.

Lichter and Johnson (1969) investigated the effects of curriculum materials which portrayed minority people in a favorable light, using control and experimental groups of white second-grade school children. For a four-month period, the children in the experimental group used a reader which included characters from several different racial and ethnic groups, while the children in the control groups used a reader which included only whites. The results of this study clearly demonstrate that the use of the multi-ethnic reader in an elementary-school setting will result in a marked positive change in attitudes toward minority people.

Thompson's research (1969) supports that of Lichter and Johnson. The objective of the Thompson study was to modify negative racial evaluation in preschool white children of the middle class through an experimental reading program consisting of storybooks presenting minority figures in a favorable light. The results of his study showed a significant reversal from a low to a high percentage on positive adjectives associated with minority figures. This finding suggests that negative attitudes actually can be transformed into positive ones through exposure to such readings in the classroom.

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Level I

Directions for the Use of This Learning Unit

The sequence used in this unit is:

1. Explanation of the guideline being discussed
2. Presentation of examples
3. Question-response series, requiring your active participation.
4. Confirmation of your response by comparison with answers provided by the authors.

To use this unit most effectively, these steps should be followed:

1. Read carefully the introduction to each guideline.
2. Examine each example provided as it appears in sequence.
3. Answer the questions by writing your response in the space provided.
4. After completing the response, compare your answer with the one provided. Try to write your answer before checking the correct response.
5. If your answer agrees with the one provided, go on to the next example. If your answer does not agree with the one provided, study the correct response carefully before moving to the next example.

Introduction

In almost every case, knowledge in school settings is gained from the written word. Books offer an opening to knowledge and give the learner many second-hand experiences. Children at an early age learn from books about people and objects they would not otherwise meet. A great many social patterns are picked up from these sources without thinking.

The printed materials of any society reveal the values, the conflicts, and the experiences, past and present, of its members. Books used in the classroom carry with them the authority of the school, so if something is stated in a book at school it "must" be true. It is, therefore, extremely important that the content of books used in classrooms and libraries be carefully examined before they are bought and used.*

* The printed materials (text and illustrations) used as examples in the following sections were derived from materials currently being used in elementary classrooms. As such, they are representative of the kinds of distortions that appear in schoolbook content with regard to the Mexican and the Mexican-American.

The following guidelines will help you analyze the texts of children's books so that you can eliminate the more obvious "bad" examples from the classroom.

Guideline #1: Overgeneralizations

The purpose of this section is to examine overgeneralizations and to demonstrate, by example, the dangers associated with them. Examples are presented with the easiest first and the most difficult last; that is, the first examples are obvious, the middle examples are more difficult, and the final examples are highly sophisticated and difficult.

Overgeneralizations are suggested whenever there is a statement that characterizes a group of people as all or never having a certain characteristic trait.

First, try to state what is wrong with the example, and then check your statement against our analysis to see whether you agree or disagree with ours.*

* Our analyses are based upon the reactions of a group of Chicano educators in the Southwest.

Example 1

All Mexicans love dancing, not just at fiestas but at any time.

What is wrong with this example?

There are some good qualities in this example. The costumes appear to be authentic, and the characters appear to be Mexicans. But these qualities are not enough to overcome the overgeneralization that Mexicans love to dance.

When one read, "Mexicans love to dance," one must pause and wonder just how many Mexicans love to dance. How about those people of Mexican heritage who do not love to dance?

Because too many unanswered impressions are left to the imagination of the child, and because the larger society already offers the child convenient stereotyped impressions, the child is led toward the conclusion that all Mexicans love to dance.

Example 2

All Chicanos use tortillas, those thin toasted cakes of ground corn.

What is wrong with this statement?

There are some good qualities in example number 2. The costume appears to be authentic; the scene, although archaic, is historically rich; and the central figure appears to be a Chicana.

As in example number 1, to state that "all Chicanos use tortillas" is an overgeneralization. But to define tortillas as "thin toasted cakes of ground corn" is to oversimplify. There are all kinds of tortillas--flour and corn tortillas being the most common. Though some tortillas are thin, others are fat. Tortillas are baked, not toasted. And very few Chicanos would look upon the tortilla as a cake. To imply that tortillas are made in this particular fashion is also in error. Tortillas are made in many different ways.

Of course, if you did not know much about making tortillas, how would you know what was wrong with this example? The overgeneralization "all Chicanos use tortillas" is one cue. The simplification of the definition of tortilla is another cue.

Example 3

The Mexicans always offer their relatives a place at the table and on the floor, even if a lot of mats are already there.

What is wrong with this example?

As in example 1 and 2, this example makes an overgeneralization about Mexicans that is not true. There are some Mexicans who are inhospitable. There are some Mexicans who refuse to allow their relatives into their homes. There are some Mexicans who offer their relatives a place in their homes on an item that is called a bed.

Guideline #2: Evaluative Statements

The following indicators will help you in the task of analyzing the texts of books for Chicanitos for statements which are comparative or evaluative in quality. Read them and then start looking at the examples that help to clarify what we mean by each indicator.

Evaluative statements are suggested whenever there are statements that:

1. Point out the quaintness, or curiousity, of a particular cultural custom;
2. Take a definitive position on a subject that is a disputable issue without citing other opinions;
3. Explicitly or implicitly state a comparison between socio-cultural systems, implying that one is better than the other;
4. Focus only on negative characteristics.

In looking at each example, first try to state what is wrong with the statement and what indicators it illustrates. After you have made your own judgment, check it against our analysis to see whether you agree or disagree.*

* Our analyses of examples are based upon the reactions of a group of Chicano educators in the Southwest.

Example 1

Hernando and his uncle were not rich, but they knew about differences in the use of money. Eighty pesos is not a large sum for North Americans, only for Mexicans. And what children earn in Mexico belongs to their parents until they marry. All they may keep is a few cents for their own pleasure.

Hernando's uncle was about to say, "Don't be silly. Buy yourself the candy. Don't talk about the money at home." But he paused. Maybe it would be better not to upset the deep-rooted customs of this culture.

What is wrong with this statement?

This example compares two economic systems with the implication that the Mexican monetary system is inferior. This example also compares two cultural customs ["What children earn in Mexico belongs to their parents."], and ends on a note of cultural superiority ["Maybe it would be better not to upset the deep-rooted customs of this culture."].

This example illustrates indicators 1 and 3:

> Statements which point out the quaintness or curiosity of a particular cultural custom.
>
> Statements which explicitly state a comparison between sociocultural systems, implying that one is better than the others.

The tendency to view customs that are different from your own as quaint or curious is a natural one. "Isn't that odd?," "Oh, how quaint!" and "That's a curious way to do things!" are common expressions used by the North American tourist in almost all foreign countries. Such comments indicate that the speaker is making unfair comparisons which will more than likely be resented by the people who are being described.

Example 2

"Juan and his mother came from a nation where the police are friends, not enemies. If they had not seen what happened themselves, they would not have known that fear of the police could force this alert girl into that car. They first thought that the girl wanted the bags in the rear seat of the unlocked car. But if she had wanted to steal, she would have run off at once with the bags, not kept hidden."

What is wrong with this example?

That Juan and his mother came "from a nation where the police are friends, not enemies" is an unfair evaluative statement in that it implies that the police in that country are enemies. Fear of the police does not necessarily imply that the police are enemies, nor does non-fear necessarily imply that they are friends.

This is an example of indicator 3:

> Statements which explicitly or implicitly state a comparison between sociocultural systems, implying that one is better than the others.

Example 3

Ms. Jones and Ms. Smith were carefully watching Mr. Garcia set up the piñata. Ms. Jones said to Ms. Smith, "There's something about piñatas..." Shaking her head sadly, she stopped. "I know what you mean," said Ms. Smith. "Brings out all the bad qualities in people. Look at that beautiful piñata. A work of art. In a few moments, it will be battered and ruined. Then watch the battle that will break out under it. Sad. Such a lovely thing. Makes you really wonder about people, doesn't it? Not just Mexican children. But people everywhere, always ready to destroy."

What is wrong with this example?

Example 3 is an example wherein the cultural customs of one country are being compared with violence because the significance of the cultural custom is misunderstood by Ms. Jones and Ms. Smith. The custom of breaking a piñata is not a violent act, and any equation of the breaking of a piñata to violence and cruelty is a value judgment. A comparable example would be a Mexican person seeing a child in the United States breaking his piggy bank or unwrapping his Christmas presents, and describing what he saw as a mindless melee or as beautiful things being mindlessly destroyed. He might even conclude that in the United States there are many people who like to destroy.

We used this example as an example of indicators number 2 and 4.

Statements which take a position on a subject that is a disputable issue, without citing other opinions.

Statements which dwell on negative characteristics only or are open to a number of interpretations.

Example 4

Carlos said to Johnny, "I've been to Mexico many times. I don't like it. There's an awful lot of killing. And people drink and shout too much. You can't leave anything of value in your house, because if someone sees it, he'll try to steal it when you're not home. Boy! I don't have bad dreams here, but in Mexico -- all the time! Everytime I hear a noise in Mexico, I get scared. You ever been bitten by a dog? You better not be in Mexico. The dogs in Mexico have rabies. They howl all the time and saliva drops from their mouths. We're lucky in California; we have all kinds of appliances. No electricity in Mexico. So no appliances. All the food spoils fast, so when we're in Mexico Mom buys only things that don't spoil.

Johnny shook his head. "Boy! I don't ever want to go to Mexico."

What is wrong with this statement?

By reading example number 4 one may well conclude that Mexico is not the place to be. Howling and rabid dogs, shouting drunks, and having no appliances are not pleasant things. And the eyewitness testimony of a Chicanito is not to be discounted.

The whole issue of accurately representing the culture and life style of a group of people is obviously a difficult and complicated one. Although for a reporter to quote a person is justified, to quote accurately and justly is most difficult. An author who writes an authentic story may present a limited perspective of a different culture. We are not suggesting that all such books be eliminated from the classroom; rather we are recommending that there should be a balanced presentation either within a book or with a number of books so that an uninformed person can make some kind of reasonable comparisons.

We have used this example to illustrate indicators number 2, 3 and 4.

> Statements which take a position on a subject which is a disputable issue, without citing other opinions.
>
> Statements which explicitly or implicitly state a comparison between sociocultural systems, implying that one is better than the others.
>
> Statements which dwell on negative characteristics only or are open to a number of interpretations.

Guideline #3: Demeaning Statements

Historically the relationship between Chicano and Anglo citizens of the United States has been one of conflict. Typically the Anglo has seen himself as superior and the Chicano as inferior. This superior-inferior attitude has created a number of overt statements that, regardless of the speaker's intentions, will be seen as "put-downs" by a Chicano listener.

The following indicators will help the uninformed person pick out demeaning statements. Demeaning statements are suggested whenever there are statements which:

1. Refer to members of an ethnic group in ethnically derogatory terms.
2. Describe a member of an ethnic group in the terms of the ideal of another ethnic group.
3. Describe only a part of the total historical picture yet imply that that part is the whole.
4. Attempt to teach only one side of the story.
5. Try to teach a moral from only one ethnic group's perspective.

Example i

Ramon was in a hurry. He had to get home to do his chores. He began to run.

"Hey, boy!" someone shouted. "Stop. Come here."

"Oh no," thought Ramon. "It sounds like that bully Claude again."

What is wrong with this example?

In this specific example there may or may not be anything wrong. Much depends upon the age of the one spoken to and on the ethnic backgrounds of the people involved.

However, the point being made here is that the term boy has historically been used to demean the minority person, especially the adult male. When Ramon is addressed as boy, it sounds demeaning and unpleasant associations may occur to the reader.

We selected this example as an example of indicator 1:

> Statements which refer to members of an ethnic group in ethnically derogatory terms.

Example 2

Aunt Gardenia was dark and beautiful. Uncle Jose was short and fat. Dolores did not talk at all. Ramon was large, but not large enough to be a man. They laughed a lot. Tacho liked them all.

What is wrong with this statement?

This example is full of stereotypes. That Mexican women are "dark and beautiful," that Mexican men are "short and fat," and that Mexicans "laugh a lot" are common stereotypes. Because the Anglo values light skin, thin features, tallness, and verbal aggressiveness, to apply the opposite features to the description of Chicano families is stereotypic and intentionally demeaning.

We selected this example as an example of indicators number 1, 2, and 4.

> Statements which refer to members of an ethnic group in ethnically derogatory terms.
>
> Statements which describe a member of an ethnic group in the terms of the ideal of another ethnic group.
>
> Statements which attempt to teach only one side of the story.

Example 3

Adan lives in a barrio. A barrio is a dangerous neighborhood. In such dangerous neighborhoods, the police are often called "pigs" and are always accused of brutality. But the police don't mind. In fact, the police teach the barrio children that it is the policeman's job to protect people. Policemen are always courteous and respectful of citizens who obey the law.

What is wrong with this example?

This example is demeaning in that it claims that barrios are dangerous neighborhoods. This example also claims that in the barrio the police are "often accused of brutality," implying that they are often falsely accused. It also implies that the parents and community residents do not teach their children that "police are there to protect people."

But, in reality, most barrios are just as safe or dangerous as any better located neighborhood. The police are often accused of brutality because the role of the police in minority communities has historically been one of force and authority (especially in the barrios). In some cases the accusations of police brutality are accurate. Many minority people have much respect for their fellow man, and teach their children to respect the law and the keepers of the law. In many cases, the common practice of having "Officer Friendly" (usually an Anglo) make the school rounds to teach the children in the barrio areas that the police are there to protect the people is a sham. Many barrio children know about the police through their observations of police conduct, and could tell you many stories about how the police help people (witness the police role in the grape and lettuce boycotts).

We have selected this example as an example of indicators number 1, 3, 4, and 5.

Statements which refer to members of an ethnic group in ethnically derogatory terms.

Statements which describe only a part of the total historical picture yet imply that that part is the whole.

Statements which attempt to teach only one side of the story.

Statements which try to teach a moral from only one ethnic group's perspective.

Guideline #4: Ethnic Stereotypes*

The purpose of this section is to examine ethnic stereotypes in children's literature, and to demonstrate by example the kinds of stereotypes to avoid when selecting books for Chicanitos. The following indicators will help you to identify those items in children's literature which have ethnic stereotype overtones. Read them and then look at the examples provided which were selected to help clarify what we mean by the concept of stereotypes in children's literature.

Stereotype statements are suggested whenever there are statements which:

1. Attach a characteristic trait to all or no people of an ethnic group.

2. Take a one-sided definitive position on an issue.

3. Explicitly or implicitly play upon well-known cliches or historical inaccuracies.

4. Dwell upon negative characteristics only.

* The authors believe that the categories "demeaning statements" and "ethnic stereotypes" should be carefully differentiated, and the differences made quite clear. A statement is demeaning if it results in the loss of position, worth, value, dignity, status, esteem, quality, or character by another person. Therefore, much depends upon the perceptions of the message sender and message receiver. An ethnic stereotype, however, attempts to make all aspects of a whole conform to a fixed general pattern. An ethnic stereotype, a standardized mental picture held in common by members of a group, represents an oversimplified opinion, affective attitude, or uncritical judgment of a person, issue, or event. Stereotypes may or may not be demeaning.

Example 1

"On the benches no one stirred. The Oaxaca Indian peasants had their people's trait of being able to stay totally motionless and relaxed for long periods. Their faces stayed immobile, but they were thinking busily."

What is wrong with this example?

The stereotype of this example is that of the silent Indian. An implication of the noble savage stereotype is also suggested.

We have selected this example as an example of indicator number 3.

Statements which explicitly play upon well-known cliches or historical inaccuracies.

Example 2

This story describes three boys--Jaime, the hero, is Mexican-American; Roosevelt is a Black-American; and Joe is an Anglo-American.

"What will we have to eat at the party?" Joe, who was round as an apple, asked.

"Tacos, frijoles, and rice," Jaime said, "and pan dulce."

"Ah, shucks." Joe was disappointed. "Why can't we have hot dogs and a birthday cake?"

Roosevelt rubbed his shiny black nose. "In South Carolina, we have grits and pork chops and plenty of gravy. Why can't we have that?" His white teeth looked like flashing buttons as he smiled, just thinking about it.

Jaime shook his head and said nothing.

What is wrong with this example?

The first set of stereotypes revolve around food concepts. That Anglo-Americans love hot dogs and birthday cake, that Black-Americans love grits, pork chops and gravy, and that Mexican-Americans eat tacos and rice are common stereotypes. The second stereotype revolves around appearance. To characterize the Black-American as having a "shiny black nose" and "white teeth... like flashing buttons" is unforgivable.

We have selected example number 4 as an example of indicators 3 and 4.

> Statements which explicitly or implicitly play upon well known cliches or historical inaccuracies.
>
> Statements which you can imagine will upset or demean the reader or listener because they dwell upon negative characteristics only.

Test Your Understanding

We have given you four guidelines to use in analyzing the content of books for use by Chicanitos, and have provided you with examples and indicators for each guideline. Now test your understanding of them. From the following list of children's books, find two examples of each guideline and state why you think these examples are either good or poor examples of the guideline.

List of Books to Use to Test Your Understanding

Behn, Harry. The Two Uncles of Pablo. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Company, 1959.

Darbois, Dominique. Tacho: Boy of Mexico. Chicago: Follett, 1961.

Franchere, Ruth. Cesar Chavez, New York: Thomas Y Crowell, 1970.

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Ritchie, Barbara. Los Cambios de Ramon. Berkeley, California: Parnassus Press, 1959.

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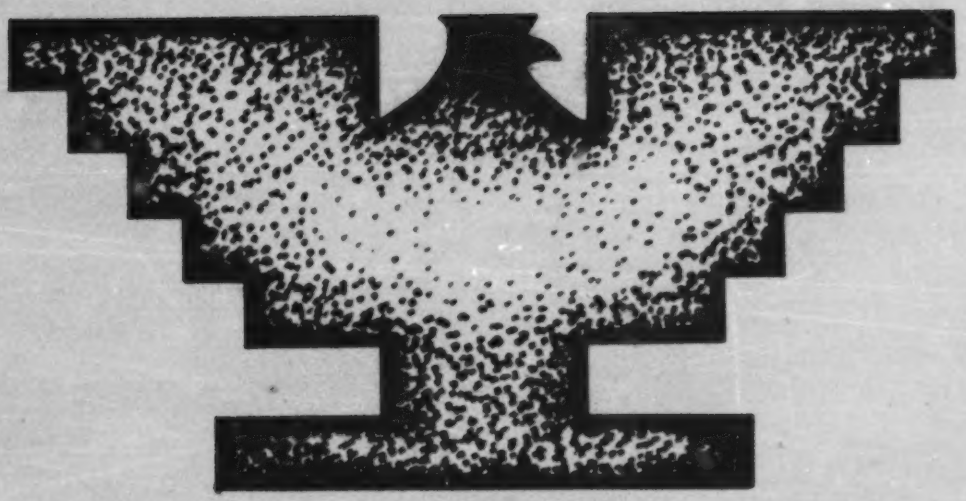
Level II



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If you use Level Two of this learning unit, refer to the following bibliography of sources for additional information on the subject matter discussed in the following pages.

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Directions for the Use of This Learning Unit

The sequence used in this unit is:

1. Explanation of the guidelines being discussed.
2. Presentation of examples.
3. Question-response series, requiring your active participation.
4. Confirmation of your response by comparison with answers provided by the authors.

To use this unit most effectively, these steps should be followed:

1. Read carefully the introduction to each guideline.
2. Examine each example provided as it appears in sequence.
3. Answer the questions by writing your responses in the space provided.
4. After completing the response, compare your answer with the one provided. Try to write your answer before checking the correct response.
5. If your answer agrees with the one provided, go on to the next example. If your answer does not agree with the one provided, study the correct response carefully before moving to the next example.

Introduction

In Level One, you worked through a series of examples that clarified guidelines to use to analyze materials for use by Chicanitos. In order to accomplish this task, you needed no more than minimal knowledge about the history and culture of the Chicano. All information necessary for analysis and evaluation was contained within the material itself. We now take you into other areas of book analysis that require knowledge and understanding of Chicano history, culture, and language.

Can any one member of an ethnic group judge the accuracy of information of an historic, cultural, or linguistic nature about his own or another ethnic group? It is only with a great deal of knowledge, experience, and practice that this can be possible. Unless you know a great deal about the history, culture, and language of the Chicano in terms of the purposes of this unit, we feel that you are not going to be able to judge the accuracy of any information other than the most simple things.

In this section, we are not suggesting that you should have a complete knowledge and understanding of the history, culture, and language of the Chicano. Nor are we suggesting that we will teach you how to recognize culturally accurate information, appropriate language, accurate treatment of material, or factual errors in texts as they relate to the Chicano. We are simply providing you with examples which will begin to sensitize you to the importance of each of the following issues involved in the analysis of the content of books for Chicanitos.

1. Is the cultural information accurate?

2. Is the language appropriate?

3. Are the sources and treatment of information accurate?

4. Do the materials contain factual errors or misleading information?

Different strategies are required to analyze and evaluate the examples provided. These strategies may include:

1. Taking ethnic studies courses at your local junior college, college, or university.

2. Enlisting the aid of Chicano organizations in your community or area.

3. Organizing a book review committee consisting of Chicano professionals and parents.

4. Making frequent and regular visits to Chicano cultural events as they occur in your area.

5. Having many and frequent discussions with the parents of the children in your classroom.

6. Learning all you can about the cultural practices and patterns of the specific learners in your classroom.

7. Reading books about Chicanos.

8. Enlisting the help of Chicano consultants as advisors.

Guideline #1: Is the Cultural Information Accurate?

With respect to providing accurate cultural information about cultures other than those of Western and Northern European origin, there are many children's books which probably have more negative than positive effect. The reasons for this are chiefly ideological and pedagogical, but ignorance also plays a part.* All too often, writers, illustrators, or publishers with goodwill spoil their product by a lack of sensitivity toward some cultural custom. Although children's books will probably never be completely free of nationalistic tendencies, it is reasonable to expect the elimination of inaccurate cultural information, especially that which is derogatory to ethnically different groups.

Children's books that relate to people living with themselves and others are usually characterized by a complexity of ideas. When cultural concepts are presented, they are most often presented somewhat at random, and children must learn to organize them. Many such concepts are completely alien to children because they have never seen, heard of or even considered any cultural groups except their own. Limited information about culturally different people in a very narrow context may result in inaccurate ideas and stereotyped concepts. To promote greater understanding of people and their relationship to themselves, to others, and to their environment, a wide variety of materials must be available, many viewpoints must be sought, and accurate generalizations must be developed. These materials, viewpoints, and generalizations must be presented so as to eliminate stereotypes and demeaning behavior.

* See Beyond "Compensatory Education."

The purpose of this guideline is to examine the concept of culturally accurate information, and to demonstrate, by providing examples and their associated analyses, the importance of this issue in the analysis of children's books. The examples provided in this section illustrate situations where there are cultural concepts which use the same language but with different meanings. Because the language connotes different perceptions within different cultures, the implications for cultural content may be missed by someone who is not familiar with the cultural differences. When the text and/or illustrations provide no differentiations between the cultural concepts, and when no explanations are offered, there is a tendency for one to interpret the concept from the only frame of reference he or she has--which is the individual's own cultural frame of reference. In many cases, this action leads to misinterpretation or negative interpretation.

Examine each example carefully and see if you can identify which aspects of each example express a different cultural concept in familiar language.

Example 1

"Alejandro! Alejandro!," shouted Mr. Sanchez. "Where is that little devil?"

Alejandro had heard his father's remark. "My father thinks I'm like a devil," he thought. "He calls all of us names. He calls Alonzo fly and Bernice bee. Amalia has dark skin so he calls her Negrita. And everybody calls us by the same nicknames. Oh, well. When you have lots of brothers and sisters, you get used to name calling. When someone calls you a name, you can always pay no attention."

Which aspects of this example reflect cultural differences between the Chicano and the Anglo?

In example number 1, the Chicano concept of nicknaming (sobrenombre) is to be differentiated from the Anglo concept of name-calling. It is not uncommon to find the practice of assigning sobrenombres in Chicano culture. To call a child bee, prune, or Negrita is understood as a term of endearment, and does not imply anything derogatory about the bearer of the nickname. Sometimes the nickname has to do with a typical characteristic the child may have (like calling a dark-skinned girl Negrita or a mischievous boy diablito), but even here the child is not being demeaned in a name-calling fashion. The cultural practice is acceptable and understood by all. This is not to say that there are no unacceptable name-calling situations in Chicano culture, because there are. The particular examples on the preceding page, however, fall under the category of sobrenombres, an acceptable and common practice. In this example, the sobrenombre cultural custom is contrasted with the name-calling cultural custom.

Example 2

"Today is the day," thought Angelo. It was that school day when everyone would tell something about his family. All too soon it was Angelo's turn.

"My father has a bad nerve," he started. "The doctor gave him some pills for it, but that didn't help. Next week he is going to see a curandero. I hope that will cure him. He sometimes runs out of his nerve and gets into fights with my Mom. When he loses his nerve, watch out!"

Which aspects of this example reflect cultural differences between the Chicano and the Anglo?

In example number 2, the character is describing his father's "bad nerve." In this case, the child is most likely trying to explain the concept of nervio. Nervio is a quality that everyone has. As long as one maintains this quality, everything is OK. When one loses this quality, there is then a disruption in temperament. This thinking is comparable to the Greek concept of body humor. The concept has to do with personality, disposition, and temperament.

In this case, the child is describing his father's ability to control his temper, or his disposition. He is accepting as a matter of fact that his father's disposition is this way. He understands that his father has little if any control over the balance of his temperament. The pills provided by a doctor also have little to do with controlling this natural environmental influence. In accepting this influence, the child does not look upon his father as unjust or cruel. The child accepts his father's behavior with some resignation, knowing that his father's condition is not permanent and that he will soon recover his temperament. The child also understands that his father continues to love him.

An Anglo child reading this Chicanito's comments could easily fail to interpret the significance of this thinking, and might berate or belittle these deep philosophical insights. If this concept is taken literally, then the Anglo child would easily miss the point.

Example 3

It was Pablo's turn to tell the class something about his family. His heart beat rapidly as he stood up to speak. All he could think of was his father.

"My father is sick," he began. "Yesterday he went to the doctor's to get some x-rays, but the doctors couldn't find anything wrong. But his back still hurts and he can't work. Tia Concha says it is air in his back."

Which aspects of this example reflect a cultural difference between the Chicano and the Anglo?

In example number 3, the Chicanito is trying to explain his father's recent illness. For someone not familiar with Chicano cultural customs, this description could well cause one to wonder how getting air in one's back would make one ill and unable to work. The Chicanito is describing the Mexican concept of aire. When a person of Mexican-Indian ancestry talks about aire, he is talking about a philosophy of thought similar to that in classical Greek philosophy. In this specific case, to get air in one's back means that the night air has manifested itself in the form of rheumatic back pains or in a mechanical dysfunction in the lumbar region. In one way, this is similar to the Anglo concept of saying, "It is going to rain tomorrow. I know, because I can feel it in my bones."

Northern Europeans, in particular the Anglo-Americans, find it most difficult to grasp this concept because they have been schooled in a materialistic, technical, industrial society. For all known phenomena there must be a logical explanation. For every cause there is a measurable effect. This is not altogether so in most of the remaining world where philosophy, science, and the spiritual go hand-in-hand. Anglo-Americans sometimes forget that scientific explanations are not easily or readily available for all things. In other parts of the world, this fact is taken for granted.

Guideline #2: Is The Language Appropriate?

Almost no other factor, with the possible exception of skin color, identifies one's social and ethnic class as distinctly as one's language pattern (Baratz, 1968,1969). In the analysis of the texts of books for use by Chicanitos, therefore, we are concerned with the language appropriateness. By language appropriateness, we do not mean the degree of conformity to a measured standard. Rather, we are advocating the value of a multilingual society and believe that the educational system should teach all children that the most important aspect of a language system is its communicative value. However, for a teacher merely to accept the existence of differences in languages is not enough. She must also view these differences as carrying no particular positive or negative value.

The purpose of this section is to examine the concept of language appropriateness from two basic perspectives. That is,

1. Is the terminology appropriate?
2. Are the definitions appropriate?

We are aware of the necessity to appraise the language used in children's books from the viewpoint of the length of the words used, the number of syllables provided, the abstractions used, the technical terms used, and the special meanings of familiar words used. However, in this guideline we will not concern ourselves with these problems.

The following examples are provided to demonstrate the importance of understanding this issue.

Example 1

It was noon, and everyone went to the cafeteria. Everyone except Natividad. Natividad had brought his lunch to school in a paper sack. He was slowly eating a taco frijole. A taco frijole is a taco that contains beans.

What is wrong with this example?

Example 2

The Mexicans call pig skin "chicharron." This Spanish word is pronounced chee CHAR ron.

What is wrong with this example?

Example 3

The Mexicans could not speak or understand English so they didn't know what was wrong. They heard "huelga" but they simply didn't know what the word meant. That's why the strike kept going for so long.

What is wrong with this example?

Examples number 1, 2, and 3 are used to illustrate the concept of appropriateness of language terminology. In example number 1, a bean taco is described as a "taco frijole." To a Spanish-speaker, a bean taco is referred to as a taco de frijol. Example number 2 states that the word for pig skin is chicharron. The word for pig skin is not chicharron, but rather it is piel de cerdo. A chicharron is a morsel of fried skin, most often of pork. The common English term for such a morsel is crackel. In example number 3, the implication is that since the Mexican nationals did not understand English they did not know what the word huelga meant. Since huelga is a Spanish word, Spanish-speakers would know what it meant. Perhaps the author meant that the Mexican nationals did not understand the farmworkers' position on the strike. If this is the intended meaning, then it is not well stated; in addition, there would most likely be other means by which the Mexican nationals could find out what was happening. A third possible interpretation could be that the Mexican nationals did not understand the neological definition of the word huelga. The archaic definition of huelga is "rest or response; relaxation from work; recreation." However, the neological definition of the word (strike; the act of quitting work to force compliance to worker demands) is the most commonly used; when the word was used in context, however, one would quickly pick up the intended meaning.

Example 4

The Mexicans use tortillas (those thin, toasted cakes of ground corn) in many different ways. You can't always tell when you are eating tortillas in Mexican food. For example, when a tortilla is used to wrap around other food, it has a different name. It is then called a taco. In Spanish this word is pronounced TAH koh.

What is wrong with this example?

Example 4 is used to demonstrate the concept of appropriateness of definition. It states that "a tortilla has a different name when it is used to wrap around food. Then it is called a taco." A tortilla is a tortilla. This example is comparable to saying that bread has another name when it is used to wrap around other food. Then it is called a sandwich.

Look at example number 5 and find the major problems of language appropriateness. Write your answers in the space provided below. Then look at our analyses of the problems of language appropriateness demonstrated within the example.

Example 5

Mordida: money demanded by the police for traffic offenses.

Plaza: large square.

Peso: Mexican coin, worth about eight cents

Tacos: Indian cornmeal pancakes stuffed with spiced beans.

Tilma: a cloak worn by many Mexican peasants.

Tortillas: cornmeal pancakes.

Examples taken from definitions provided in children's books.

Can you explain what is wrong with the definitions in this example?

Problems with example number 5

Mordida--to define a mordida as "money demanded by the police for traffic offenses" is to narrowly define a standard operating procedure. Because of the omitted information, one might assume that it is in some way immoral or illegal. The practice of paying for minor infractions of the law on-the-spot is an acceptable practice in many countries, and should carry no negative connotations because of its illegality in the United States judicial system.

Plaza--to define a "plaza" as a large square could be quite confusing to a learner. A plaza is a public square in a city or town.

Peso--to describe a peso as a Mexican coin worth about eight cents is to comparatively evaluate two monetary systems, with the implication of inferiority directed toward the peso.

Tacos--to define the taco as Indian cornmeal pancakes stuffed with spiced beans is too narrow. Tacos are not only stuffed with spiced beans. Tacos are not Indian cornmeal pancakes. To describe tacos as an Indian pancake is to imply that the taco is purely an Indian product, that the taco is only made of cornmeal, and that the taco is like a pancake. Tacos are made of tortilla which contains any variety of Mexican cuisine (such as meat, cheese, rice, beans, eggs, etc.). A more appropriate comparative definition would be to describe the taco as very similar to bread and the sandwich. The ideal way would be to describe the taco in terms of how it is made and what it does.

Tilma--to define a tilma as a "cloak worn by many Mexican peasants" is demeaning. The fact that a tilma is a cloak is true; however, many people wear tilmas. The statement that the tilma is worn by many Mexican peasants is irrelevant to the definition of the term.

Tortillas--to define a tortilla as a "cornmeal pancake" is to misrepresent what the tortilla is. Tortillas are made in many different fashions and from many different things. Though cornmeal is perhaps the main ingredient in the types of tortillas made in Mexico, flour is also used. To compare the tortilla to a pancake is also misleading, since the tortilla resembles the pancake in shape only.

Guideline #3: Are the Sources and Treatment of Information Accurate?

In far too many children's books, authors and illustrators have either failed to consider or have ignored the need to check the source of their information, thereby committing an error in the accurate treatment of their subject matter. In some books where the source of the information was accurate, inaccurate treatment of information occurred because the author misunderstood or misinterpreted the information. This may have been caused by cultural bias or cultural insensitivity or ignorance on the part of the author. It is our contention that the characters and situations in books designed for use by the Chicanito must be realistically developed and either true or possibly true to the style depicted. Remember that to be fair and accurate the information must show many sides of the event, issue, problem, or concern.

The purpose of this section is to look at examples which will help to demonstrate the importance of accurate source and treatment of information.

Example 1

Adan lives in a barrio. A barrio is a dangerous neighborhood. In such dangerous neighborhoods, the police are often called pigs and are always accused of brutality. But the police don't mind. In fact, the police teach the barrio children that it is the policemen's job to protect people. Policemen are always courteous and respectful of citizens who obey the law.

Can you identify why this example may lead to misunderstandings?

Example 1 is an example where the source of information is based upon one value system that is different from another. To describe a barrio as a "dangerous neighborhood" to one who lives in the barrio cues the reader or listener to the fact that there is something definitely wrong with someone's perceptions and interpretations. Unfortunately, too often the reader or listener believes what he or she sees in print or hears from the teacher. The statement that the barrio is a dangerous neighborhood is one which comes mostly from the Anglo stereotype. Statistics will verify the fact that the barrio is probably as safe as any other neighborhood. That the police are often accused of brutality is information which is again based upon a value judgment. The implication here is that they are falsely accused of brutality. In most barrios, the police are seen only in their role of authoritarian law-keepers. Sometimes they make mistakes, and sometimes they treat people unfairly. To imply that they do not, or that they are often accused of brutality, implying that this is false, is to represent only one interpretation of the facts.

Example 2

Carlos said to Johnny, "I've been to Mexico many times. I don't like it. There's an awful lot of killing. And people drink and shout too much. You can't leave anything of value in your house, because if you do and someone sees it, he'll try to steal it when you're not home. Boy! I don't have bad dreams here, but in Mexico -- all the time! Every time I hear a noise in Mexico, I get scared. You ever been bitten by a dog? You better not in Mexico. The dogs in Mexico have rabies. They howl all the time, and saliva drops from their mouths. We're lucky in California; we have all kinds of appliances. No electricity in Mexico. So no appliances. All the food spoils fast, so when we're in Mexico my Mon only buys things that don't spoil."

Johnny shook his head. "Boy! Boy! I don't ever want to go to Mexico."

Are the sources and treatment of the information in this example accurate?

In example 2, the source of the information is a Chicanito. What better source of information? The Chicanito, however, may be totally unaware of or little comprehend the nature of his stories. Nevertheless, the child is unwittingly generalizing certain negative experiences to describe Mexico as a whole. He is also implying that none of these negative experiences occur in the United States. Thus, Mexico is oversimplified as bad, and the United States as good.

Guideline #4: Does the Text Contain Factual Errors or Misleading Information?

Inaccuracies in historical concepts have all too readily found their way into far too many of the currently available children's books. That factual errors or misleading information must be eliminated from children's books would be contested by no modern educator. But as to what exactly would constitute factual error or misleading information is the subject of many a heated argument. It is our position that to be truly accurate, information must show many sides of an event, issue, problem, or concern. To do this may require more than one book, or more than one source of information. We also believe that if the information in children's books must be simplified to the point of inaccuracy or incompleteness for the age level of children involved, then it is best to wait to present the information at a time when it could be accurately presented.

The purpose of this section is to examine some examples which demonstrate the importance of the guideline of "factual errors or misleading information."

Example 1

The very happy revolutionary leaders began to plan a new and more democratic constitution for Mexico. But Zapata kept to himself and seemed troubled. He was friendly only with the blond, dashing, and burly Francisco Villa, a former bandit who had become the leader of those who lived in the northern pueblo.

What is the factual error in this example?

Example number 1 illustrates how a factual error can lead the reader or listener to a false impression. Zapata's friend Villa is described as blond, dashing and burly. These characteristics more aptly describe the Anglo-American hero ideal. The fact is that Pancho Villa was not blond. Rather, the many photographs and recorded written descriptions of him depict him as having dark eyes, dark hair, and dark complexion. His features were clearly more like those of most Chicanitos themselves.

A second factual error lies in the description of Pancho Villa as a former bandit. Villa was a bandit in the eyes of the Mexican Federalist Government, but his followers and supporters have described him as a rebel and revolutionary. To describe him as a former bandit is comparable to describing the first president of the United States as a former criminal. In the eyes of the English government, he was.

Examples 2 and 3 both attempt to tell about Cesar Chavez. However, example number 2 is filled with factual errors and misleading statements. Example number 3 is more descriptive and factual, with fewer misleading statements. Can you discover the factual errors and misleading statements in these examples?

Example 2

By the time he was done with eighth grade, Cesar Chavez had been a pupil in about thirty-six schools in California. His parents were Mexican-American migrants who worked their way through the state as the crops ripened. They were paid so little for their hard labor that they could not buy even enough food and clothing for their family.

That's why Chavez wanted to help his fellow workers. He began to teach them English. He showed them that they needed to improve their miserable living conditions. When the grape pickers finally joined together to strike for decent wages, Chavez led a boycott of grapes. Truckers, longshoremen, and shoppers all took part. His name and his goals have become a popular cause.

Example 3

Cesar Chavez (1927-)

Chavez loves the soil and understands farm workers because he was born and raised on a farm. He is one of the most important men in agriculture today, because he is the champion of the farm worker in the Southwest.

Chavez was born in Yuma, Arizona. He lived on his father's farm on the Colorado River until it went broke. Living in tents and walking barefoot, the family followed the crops into California. His father's efforts to organize farm workers into unions failed, but young Cesar learned that workers must protect their own interests as other groups have done.

After becoming active in Los Angeles community affairs, Chavez was elected General Director of the Community Service Organization. He left the CSO in 1961 to work with farm workers. The National Farm Workers Association, formed in 1962, became under Chavez a champion of farm workers. The group has tried to gain for farm workers the legal protection that industrial workers enjoy in the cities. Chavez believes that worker unions and employers should cooperate peacefully to establish wages and good working conditions.

Example taken from Mexican-Americans: Past, Present, and Future, by Julian Nava. New York: American Book Company, 1968, p. 99.

Test Your Understanding

We have given you four guidelines to use in analyzing the text of books for use by Chicanitos, and have provided you with examples for each guideline. Now test your understanding of them. Using the following list of children's books as references, find two examples of each guideline. State why you think these examples are either good or poor examples of the guideline.

List of Books to Use to Test Your Understanding

Allyn, Paul. The Picture Life of Herman Badillo. New York: Franklin Watts, 1972.

Beck, Barbara L. The First Book of the Ancient Maya. New York: Franklin Watts, 1965.

Beck, Barbara L. The First Book of the Aztecs. New York: Franklin Watts, 1969.

Belpre, Pura. Santiago. New York: Fredrick Warne, 1969.

Bulla, Clyde Robert. Benito. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1961.

Cohen, Robert. The Color of Man. Westminster, Md.: Random House, 1968.

Delgadillo, Teresa. Se Quién Soy. Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1972.

Edell, Celeste. Present from Rosita. New York: Archway Books; Washington Square Press, 1967.

Epstein, Sam and Beryl. The First Book of Mexico. New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1967.

Farquhar, Margaret C. A Book to Begin on the Indians of Mexico. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1976.

Galarza, Ernesto. Zoo-Risa. Santa Barbara, California: McNally & Loftin Publishers, 1968.

Gee, Maurine H. Chicano, Amigo. New York: William Morrow, 1965.

Greene, Carla. Los Camioneros: ¿Que Hacen? New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969.

Lattimore, Eleanor F. Mexican Bird. New York: William Morrow, 1965.

McNeer, May. Mexican Story. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1953.

Molnar, Joe. Graciela: A Mexican-American Child Tells Her Story. New York: Franklin Watts, 1972.

O'Dell, Scott. The Treasure of Topo-El-Bampo. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972.

Politi, Leo. Juanita. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948.

Politi, Leo. Rosa. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963.

Schweitzer, B.B. Amigo. New York: Mcmillan Company, 1963.

Showers, Paul. Your Skin and Mine. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1965.

Sonneborn, Ruth A. Friday Night Is Papa Night. New York: Viking Press, 1970.

Stolz, Mary. Juan. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

Swiger, Elinor P. Mexico for Kids. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970.

Talbott, Tony. My House Is Your House. New York: Cowles Book Company, 1970.

RECOGNITION: MATCH THE EXAMPLE WITH THE GUIDELINE

Each of the following examples illustrates one of the guidelines you have learned by working with this learning unit. Although each example may fall under more than one category, or each category may be applicable to more than one example, fit each example under only one category and for each category have only one example. Try for the best fit. Match each example with its most appropriate category by drawing a line from the example to its most appropriate category.

overgeneralization and simplification	●	● Ancient ways of life are still being practiced in Mexico. For example, Mexican farmers still cultivate their fields with old-fashioned implements. But ancient traditions are slowly being replaced by modern customs, as they certainly should.
evaluative statement	●	● Mexico, a conquered land, has a unique history. It was conquered by Spaniards in 1521. The conquerors brought both good and evil. The Mexican Indians first welcomed these foreigners to their land. But as violence and conquest occurred, they fought for their independence. When they at last won their freedom, the Mexicans started to fight one another.
demeaining statement	●	● Johnny Jones, a perfectly ordinary American boy, had come to Mexico with his parents to live. Until he met Jesus, he had never seen a Mexican. He was not used to seeing squat, dark-skinned, broad-faced Mexican foreigners.
ethnic stereotype	●	● Mexican women always accept what their husbands say. If they do not, then their husbands get angry. But good Mexican wives do not speak back to their husbands.
inaccurate cultural information	●	● Pedro always wanted to help his fellow Chicano. That is why he became an educator. He would begin by teaching them English. He could then convince Chicanos of the need to improve their miserable living conditions.
inappropriate language	●	● Tio Antonio said, "In order to be an American, you must learn to speak English well." "I know, Tio," said Jorge, "but sometimes I get confused when I have to speak Spanish at home and English at school."
inaccurate source and treatment of information	●	● Cesar Chavez, that middle-aged, dark-skinned leader of the Mexican farm workers' movement, has back trouble. Doing stoop labor for so many years has injured his back. When he is tired, his back always hurts painfully.
factual error or misleading information	●	● The farmers would not pay the wages being asked by the farm workers. So the workers started la huelga. La huelga was that time when workers would not go to the vineyards to work. It was the rest from work.

overgeneralization and simplification	Ancient ways of life are still being practiced in Mexico. For example, Mexican farmers still cultivate their fields with old fashioned implements. But ancient traditions are slowly being replaced by modern customs, as they certainly should.
evaluative statement	Mexico, a conquered land, has a unique history. It was conquered by Spaniards in 1521. The conquerors brought both good and evil. The Mexican Indians first welcomed these foreigners to their land. But as violence and conquest occurred, they fought for their independence. When they at last won their freedom, the Mexicans started to fight one another.
demeaning statement	Johnny Jones, a perfectly ordinary American boy, had come to Mexico with his parents to live. Until he met Jesus, he had never seen a Mexican. He was not used to seeing squat, dark-skinned, broad-faced Mexican foreigners.
ethnic stereotype	Mexican women always accept what their husbands say. If they do not, then their husbands get angry. But good Mexican wives do not speak back to their husbands.
inaccurate cultural information	Pedro always wanted to help his fellow Chicano. That is why he became an educator. He would begin by teaching them English, He could then convince Chicanos of the need to improve their miserable living conditions.
inappropriate language	Tio Antonio said, "In order to be an American, you must learn to speak English well," "I know, Tio," said Jorge, "but sometimes I get confused when I have to speak Spanish at home and English at school."
inaccurate source and treatment of information	Cesar Chavez, that middle-aged, dark-skinned leader of the Mexican farm workers' movement, has back trouble. Doing stoop labor for so many years has injured his back. When he is tired, his back always hurts painfully.
factual error or misleading information	The farmers would not pay the wages being asked by the farm workers. So the workers started la huelga. La huelga was that time when workers would not go to the vineyards to work. It was the rest from work.

ACTION: REWRITE THE EXAMPLE

Rewrite the following examples so that they do not violate the guidelines you have learned in this learning unit.

This exercise is intended to enable you to see the complexities in analyzing the written material found in classrooms. To complete this section, you should try to rewrite each example in a more accurate way.

Though we ask you to rewrite the example, we do not expect you to rewrite for accurate cultural, linguistic, or historical information. This exercise is not a test of your knowledge of the history, language, and culture of the Chicano. Those wishing a greater understanding of Chicano history, language, and culture are referred to other sources. However, when you do this exercise, we do expect you to be able to recognize the distortions in the examples and to apply the major guidelines you have learned in this unit to the task of rewriting the examples.

What is wrong with this example?

It is the custom in Mexico to take a nap in the afternoon when the sun is quite hot. This nap is called a siesta. A siesta is taken by putting on a sombrero, pulling it down to protect the face from the sun, putting on a sarape, and sitting under a cactus. A sombrero is a Mexican hat. A sarape, which is worn by men, takes the place of a blanket or overcoat.

Rewrite this example in a more accurate way.

EXAMPLE	WHAT WAS WRONG
It is the custom in Mexico to take a nap in the afternoon when the sun is quite hot. This nap is called a siesta.	A siesta is the hottest part of the day. It is also the time for quiet rest after dinner -- usually from 1 to 3 p.m. It also refers to afternoon music in churches.
A siesta is taken by putting on a sombrero, pulling it down to protect the face from the sun, putting on a sarape, and sitting under a cactus.	This description is inaccurate. This ritual is not a custom of Mexicans; rather, it is a common stereotype about the Mexican and his customs.
A sombrero is a Mexican hat.	Sombrero is the Spanish word for hat.
A sarape, which is worn by men, takes the place of a blanket or overcoat.	Sarape is the Spanish word for a narrow woolen blanket worn as a cloak or poncho.

sample rewrite

In Mexico it is common practice to rest in the afternoon between 1 and 3 p.m. This is called a siesta.

What is wrong with this example?

The custom of breaking a piñata is a violent act. It brings out cruelty in people. It should not be used with children because it encourages the urge for destruction. This curious custom originate in Mexico. It has not been eliminated because it is best not to interfere with the customs of primitive peoples.

Rewrite this example in a more accurate way.

EXAMPLE	WHAT WAS WRONG
The custom of breaking a piñata is a violent act. It brings out cruelty in people.	"Violent act" and "cruelty are value judgments. A piñata is a decorated container filled with goodies and hung to be used in festive occasions. A participant is given a stick. then blindfolded. After being moved around so he is unsure of his location, he is asked to break the container of goodies. When the piñata is broken, the other participants gather up the goodies.
It should not be used with children because it encourages the urge for destruction.	"...encourages the urge for destruction" is a value judgment.
This curious custom originated in Mexico.	The word "curious" is a value-laden word.
It has not been eliminated because it is best not to interfere with the customs of primitive peoples.	The phrase "has not been eliminated" embodies the idea of cultural homicide. The phrase "best not to interfere with the customs of primitive peoples" embodies the notion of cultural superiority.

sample rewrite

Breaking a piñata on festive occasions is a practice used by many people familiar with Mexican customs.

What is wrong with this example?

Juan lives in a barrio. A barrio is a dangerous neighborhood where Mexicans live. Most Mexicans are short and dark-skinned, but Juan is not. He has blond hair and blue eyes. Almost everyone likes him.

Rewrite this example in a more accurate way.

EXAMPLE	WHAT WAS WRONG
Juan lives in a barrio. A barrio is a dangerous neighborhood where Mexicans live.	The phrase "dangerous neighborhood" is a value judgment. A barrio is one of the districts or wards into which a large town or city is subdivided. The simplest translation of the term "barrio" is "a Chicano neighborhood." A barrio is a designtion of community, the boundaries of which can be definite or changing.
Most Mexicans are short and dark-skinned,	This description is a common stereotype of the physical appearance of Mexicans or Mexican-Americans.
but Juan is not.	This statement implies a difference from the usual and alerts the reader to take note. It suggests that an evaluative judgment will follow.
He has blond hair and blue eyes. Almost everyone likes him.	This statement could imply preference for physical characteristics, and inferior status for those who do not have the favored physical characteristics.

sample rewrite

Juan lives in a barrio. A barrio is a Chicano neighborhood. Juan is a Chicano. Almost everyone likes Juan.

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